2007 ULI Hines Student Urban Design Competition.

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Abstract
Cornell fielded five entries in 2007 Urban Land Institute Gerald D. Hines Student Urban Design Competition, which takes place each year over 10 days in January, just as students are returning from winter break. Now in its fifth year, the competition aims to strengthen the interdisciplinary ties between business, architecture, planning, and landscape architecture. Each team consists of five graduate students from at least three distinct disciplines, and draws upon their combined talents to produce schematic designs, redevelopment strategies, and financial analyses to solve a real-life urban design problem.

Keywords
Cornell, competition, real estate, Urban Land Institute, "Flood the Banks"
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“Flood the Banks – A Catalyst for Symbiotic Growth in the Rio District,” pictured below, was one team’s response to the challenge posed in the 2007 competition brief, sited in East Los Angeles. Their solution, a combination of bricks-and-mortar redevelopment and ecologically sensitive interventions, proposed innovative design strategies for rejuvenating the L.A. River and its adjacent land.

The competition site was a 1.12 mile stretch of East First Street bisected by the L.A. River and surrounded by freeways on three sides. Teams were required to suggest a development strategy for the existing Mariachi Plaza district and to produce a land use plan for the East First Street Corridor and the L.A. River. The design addressed several challenges, including a culturally diverse neighborhood, poor integration with the surrounding urban fabric, minimal economic development and the flood risk inherent in the recla-
mation of the concrete-encased river. In its attempt to reconcile these complex adjacencies, the team capitalized on the site’s connection to downtown L.A. and a new metro stop under construction at Mariachi Plaza.

“Flood the Banks” prompts an economic and cultural revitalization of the corridor through a phased process of ecological and social reintegration with the L.A. River. To abate flood risks and promote hydrologic health, the design incorporates a comprehensive stormwater management system comprising bio-swales, green roofs and detention ponds. Recreational paths introduced along the river and a grove of symbolically native sycamore trees compose an outdoor museum to celebrate local history, raise public awareness and connect the divided corridor. Finally, a mixed-use, transit-oriented development at Mariachi Plaza seizes on the possibility of increased commercial activity as a result of the new metro stop.

Shortlisted as one of the top 25 projects, the design received positive feedback from the jury such as “well thought-out,” “clever,” and “complete.” According to the team, the project was an enriching experience in interdisciplinary collaboration. In the words of team leader Laryssa Stecyk MLA ’09, “The greatest value of the ULI competition lay in an exchange between intensely dedicated and energetic people which led to an exciting and rich design. Anyone seeking to be pushed to their limits should consider this challenge. The experience was invaluable.”